

NEWS from the T&I DEMOCRATS

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Democratic Caucus

U.S. House of Representatives, 2163 Rayburn HOB, Washington, DC 20515

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For Immediate Release: Thursday, September 15, 2005

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House Approves Coast Guard Bill *Oberstar praises actions in wake of Katrina*

WASHINGTON—By a vote of 415-0, the House today approved HR 899, the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2005, authorizing \$8.6 billion for Coast Guard operations and acquisitions for Fiscal Year 2006.

During debate on the House Floor, Rep. James L. Oberstar (Minn.), Ranking Democratic Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, took the opportunity to praise the service for its “heroic efforts in the Katrina disaster.”

The text of Rep. Oberstar’s statement follows:

Mr. Speaker, before getting into the specifics of this legislation, I would like to say a few things about the heroic efforts that the men and women serving in the Coast Guard performed in response to Hurricane Katrina over the past two weeks.

- On Saturday, August 28, aircraft from Air Stations in New Orleans, Houston, and Mobile flew over the destroyed Gulf coast and New Orleans. They immediately began hoisting survivors and transporting them to safety while calling for reinforcements.
- As the scope of the disaster became known, every Coast Guard Air Station around the United States began dispatching aircraft and extra aircrews to support these rescue operations.
- Logistics and support personnel were deployed to the Gulf region to keep these aircraft flying 24 hours a day.
- Cutters and boat crews were brought in to provide emergency communications and to conduct waterborne rescues.
- All of this was done when the Coast Guard’s own facilities were severely damaged or destroyed:
 - The Air Station in New Orleans was flooded and much of its roof was peeled back.
 - The Coast Guard Air Facility in Mobile had damage to their roof, lost all of its operations space, maintenance space, power, and telephone communications.
 - Station Gulfport was destroyed.
 - The Integrated Support Command in New Orleans was flooded and destroyed.
 - Buoys and other aids-to-navigation were destroyed or pushed off-station.
 - The Vessel Traffic Service Radar in Berwick Bay was destroyed.
 - The District 8 headquarters in New Orleans had to be evacuated and all these operations were moved to St. Louis.

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- Over the first seven days, the Coast Guard helicopter crews saved 6,470 lives in New Orleans alone in over 1,500 flight hours. The totals from the other Gulf communities haven't been totaled yet.
- Rescue swimmers dropped from helicopters had to rescue people in houses, maneuver around downed power lines, hack through attic roofs with axes, and endure foul and contaminated water. One HH-60 helicopter crew saved 150 people during their shift. Another HH-65 air crew saved 100.

Mr. Speaker, the Coast Guard saw the storm that was coming, prepared their response before the levees broke, and had their men and women in position to rescue people immediately. To the Coast Guard, training is not just a paper exercise. It is a way to ensure that they are ready to handle whatever is thrown at them.

The Coast Guard heroic efforts in the Katrina disaster are an added reason to support the authorization bill developed by the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on a bipartisan basis.

H.R. 889, the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2005:

- Authorizes \$8.7 billion for the Coast Guard for fiscal year 2006 including –
 - \$5.6 billion for Coast Guard Operating Expenses.
 - \$1.9 billion for the Guard's Acquisition, Construction, and Improvement program including \$1.6 billion for the Integrated Deepwater System Program to replace all of their cutters and aircraft and \$284 million to keep their old ships and aircraft operating.
 - \$24 million for research and development to support their many missions including search and rescue, marine safety, and marine environmental protection.
 - \$35.9 million to remove or alter bridges that are obstructions to safe navigation.
 - \$12 million to clean up environmental and pollution problems at Coast Guard facilities.

When I was first elected to Congress in 1974, there were 35,000 officers and enlisted members of the Coast Guard including 4,400 officers, 1,200 warrant officers, and 30,000 enlisted personnel. Today, there are 40,000 members of the Coast Guard including approximately 6,000 officers, 1,500 warrant officers, and 32,000 enlisted personnel. Over the past 30 years, Congress has repeatedly called on the Coast Guard to do more, such as expanding its pollution cleanup and port security responsibilities, with few additional personnel.

H.R. 889 also makes a number of substantive changes to law including:

- Closing a loophole to ensure that ferries that do not charge fees to their passengers are still subject to all Coast Guard marine safety laws.
- Requiring the Coast Guard to adjust the rate of compensation for Great Lakes pilots before March 1 of each year.
- Requiring the Secretary of Transportation to develop a program to develop and implement a program to promote the transportation of liquefied natural gas to the United States on U.S.-flag vessels.
- Requiring a study of the Coast Guard's marine casualty investigation program to ensure that the results of these investigations provide information that will help prevent future casualties and maximize the lives saved in similar accidents.
- Authorizing the Coast Guard to request reports from ship mortgagees to help ensure the sanctity of our coastwise trade laws.

I would like to thank our distinguished Chairman, Chairman Young, for his leadership on this legislation and the bipartisan manner that he and Subcommittee Chairman LoBiondo used to develop this legislation. I would also like to thank our Ranking Democrat, the gentleman from California, Mr. Filner, for all of his work on this legislation.

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Mr. Speaker, the men and women that serve in the United States Coast Guard put their lives on the line every day to save others. It is important for the House of Representatives to show their support for the Coast Guard.

I urge my colleagues to support passage of H.R. 889, the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2005.

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